

Hill Leaders Back Carter On Cuban Role in Zaire

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President Carter yesterday won the support of congressional leaders of both parties for his assertions that Cuban forces trained and equipped with Soviet weapons the Katangan rebels who invaded southern Zaire last month.

Cuba has denied any involvement and, joined by other nations, has called on the United States to back its claim.

Carter, backed by CIA director Stansfield Turner, briefed congressional leaders yesterday who emerged from the 45-minute session with ringing endorsements of the U.S. position. The administration is resisting any attempt to make its information public.

In another development concerning major-power influence in Africa, the Chinese foreign minister, Huang Hua, reportedly flew to Zaire yesterday, immediately after conferring with Secretary of State Cyrus R. Vance in New York.

"I'M CONVINCED beyond a shadow of a doubt that the president is correct, that there has been Cuban support and Russian involvement," said Senate GOP Leader Howard Baker.

House Republican Leader John Rhodes said Carter and Turner did not offer any documentary evidence. "There really wasn't any exhibit A or B or C, but Adm. Turner did brief us on the reasons they feel there was Cuban involvement in the training and equipping of the Katangese," he said.

Rhodes noted that there were about 20,000 Cubans in neighboring Angola. The Cuban bases are located

in areas where the Katangan rebels are harbored. "Being a lawyer," he said, "I'd say the prime facie case has been proved."

House Speaker Thomas P. O'Neill said Carter offered 35 instances of information that supported the U.S. assertion. "I think his sources were reliable and credible," O'Neill said.

He was asked if that meant to him that the Cubans were lying. "As far as I'm concerned, that has to be the answer," O'Neill said.

Senate Democratic Leader Robert Byrd also endorsed the accuracy of Carter's information through a spokesman from his office.

THE WHITE HOUSE, meanwhile, acknowledged that U.S. Air Force jet transports will be used to evacuate French foreign legionnaires the United States helped to deliver to Zaire, where they parachuted in to rescue 3,000 Europeans trapped and threatened by Katangan rebels who massacred groups of whites and blacks while they held the Shaba province town of Kolwezi.

The transports also would be used to ferry into Zaire a pan-African peace-keeping force being put together by France from among French-speaking former African colonies.

The trip of the Chinese foreign minister to Zaire and his meeting with Vance at a time when the United States is searching for ways to counter Soviet-Cuban influence in Africa was taken as indicating China may now be ready to lend its influence to countering the Soviets there as well.

Nothing of the Vance-Huang meeting was disclosed. A U.S. spokesman said only that their talks were "useful and constructive."